

Note: Several of these questions make references to local data. Please consider those questions relative to the context of your setting. For example, if you are an AEA consultant using these questions with a group of curriculum directors, you may choose to discuss these issues in relation to aggregated AEA data. If you are a principal using these questions with a group of teachers, the local data you might want to ask them to consider is your school's or district's data.

Study Questions for

Improving Rigor and Relevance in the High School Curriculum

1. The paper uses data on graduation rate, course enrollments, and course offerings collected by the Department to make the case for change in Iowa's high schools. Which data causes you the greatest concern? Why? How does your local data compare with that cited in the paper? What concerns does that create?
2. The paper references the work of Rogers and Freiberg (1994) who referred to disengaged high school students as "tourists in the classroom". To what degree is student disengagement a problem locally? What indicators are you using to measure student engagement?

What efforts, if any, have been made to re-engage students? Have they been effective? Why or why not?

3. Some Iowa school boards have made efforts to improve high school student achievement by raising graduation requirements. How effective is this as a solution for improving student achievement locally? Why or why not?
4. The paper identifies three factors that have been demonstrated to create rigorous learning experiences: 1) high quality teaching; 2) rigorous, well-defined curriculum standards, benchmarks, and corresponding assessments; and 3) high expectations for student performance. To what extent are these factors present in your local high school? What can be done locally to improve these factors?
5. Think about a content area with which you are familiar. Identify instructional activities and assessments that students are asked to do within this content area. What quadrant/s of the Rigor and Relevance Framework do these tasks fit in? Support your answer with specific examples.

Given what you've just described, how compelling is it to move instruction to higher levels of rigor and relevance? Explain.

6. W. R. Daggett contends that little of the work high school students are asked to do is in Quadrant D. To what degree do you agree with his contention? Explain.

7. The paper identifies a number of strategies that are likely to promote student learning in Quadrants B, C, and D. Those strategies are the following:

- Contextual Teaching and Learning
- Collaborative Work and Choice
- Interdisciplinary Approaches to Curriculum and Instruction
- Inquiry Training
- Thinking Inductively
- Concept Attainment

To what extent are these strategies incorporated into instruction at your local high school? What other strategies (than those listed above) are teachers using that promote learning beyond Quadrant A?

8. Based on the information you've gathered, what are some possible next steps in addressing any of the initial concerns? What else might you do to further deepen your understanding of the Rigor and Relevance Framework and its implications for planning, teaching, and assessing?